

Message Text

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70

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

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R 201050Z APR 76 ZDK

FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2449

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, TS

SUBJECT: MOHAMED MASMOUDI TELLS "ALL" TO JEUNE AFRIQUE,
GOT LIKES NONE OF IT

REF: TUNIS 1673

1. CURRENT ISSUE OF WEEKLY MAGAZINE JEUNE AFRIQUE, BANNED IN TUNIS, CARRIES ONE PAGE ARTICLE BY EX-TUNISIAN FOREIGN MINISTER MOHAMED MASMOUDI IN WHICH HE EXPLAINS HIS "QUARRELS" WITH THE EGYPTIAN POLICE. HE GIVES HIS SIDE OF THE STORY IN HIS ARREST AND DETENTION BY EGYPTIAN SECURITY FORCES IN EARLY MARCH IN CONNECTION WITH A LIBYAN ATTEMPT TO KIDNAP OR ASSASSINATE LIBYAN REVOLUTIONARY COMMAND COUNCIL MEMBERS OMAR MUHAYSHI AND ABDELMONEM AL-HUNI. MASMOUDI CLAIMS THAT HE KNEW NOTHING OF ANY SUCH PLOT AND SPECULATES THAT THERE NEVER WAS A LARG PLOT AS DENOUNCED BY THE EGYPTIAN GOVERNMENT. HE SAYS HE WAS IN CAIRO TO DISCUSS AL-HUNI'S RETURN TO TRIPOLI AND ASSERTS THAT THE DATE AND TERMS OF THIS RETURN HAVE BEEN SET. MASMOUDI'S STATEMENTS SAID LITTLE OF TUNISIA, ONLY REMARKING THAT THE TUNISIAN

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EMBASSY IN CAIRO HAD DONE NOTHING TO HELP HIM DURING HIS

DETENTION AND SPECULATING THAT THE ALLEGED LIBYAN PLOT AGAINST GOT PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA WAS NOT TRUE. HE NOTED THAT IF THE PLOTS AGAINST MUHAYSHI, AL-HUNI, OR NOUIRA WERE PROVED TRUE, HE WOULD BE THE FIRST TO CONDEMN THEM.

2. GOT AUTHORITIES ADVISED JEUNE AFRIQUE'S TUNIS BUREAU CHIEF THAT THE ISSUE CARRYING MASMOUDI'S STATEMENT COULD NOT BE SOLD. JEUNE AFRIQUE'S NORMAL WEEKLY CIRCULATION HERE IS 10,000. JA BUREAU CHIEF TOLD US THAT IN THE PAST GOT WOULD SEIZE ALL COPIES OF THE MAGAZINE BUT NOW HE HAS BEEN LEFT WITH THEM. HE BELIEVED THAT GOT INTERDICTION WAS MORE MENACING THAN IN PAST INSTANCES AND BELIEVED THAT JEUNE AFRIQUE RAN THE RISK OF BEING BLOCKED FROM THE TUNIS MARKET FOR TWO OR THREE MONTHS AS WAS LE MONDE IN EARLY 1976.

3. COMMENT: MASMOUDI STATEMENT IS THE KIND OF SELF-SERVING, FACE-SAVING DECLARATION THAT SHOULD HAVE BEEN EXPECTED FROM THIS CRAFTY POLITICIAN CAUGHT IN A SLEAZY OPERATION. HIS ONLY DIRECT CRITICISM OF GOT WAS COMPLAINT THAT TUNISIAN EMBASSY IN CAIRO HAD NOT CHECKED UP ON HIM AFTER HIS ARREST AS IT IS SUPPOSED TO DO EVEN FOR "BIG TIME THIEVES AND PICKPOCKETS." MASMOUDI ANSWERS NONE OF THE MORE SERIOUS CHARGES MADE AGAINST HIM AND THIS JEUNE AFRIQUE PIECE MIGHT WELL HAVE SERVED TO REINFORCE AMONG WELL-INFORMED TUNISIANS A SENSE OF DISMAY AND DISGUST AT MASMOUDI'S DEALINGS. THIS JEUNE AFRIQUE ISSUE INCLUDED, HOWEVER, ANOTHER ARTICLE ON TUNISIA COVERING A SHOW OF CARICATURES OF TUNISIAN PERSONALITIES HELD IN EARLY MARCH (SEE TUNIS 1959 AND EMBASSY OM TO INR/OIL/BR DATED MARCH 10, 1976). IT DESCRIBED THE SHOW, WHICH WAS A GREAT SUCCESS, AND NOTED THAT THE ARTIST, ALI ABID, WAS ONCE A PRESIDENTIAL BODY GUARD. THE ARTICLE, ENTITLED "A VERY GIFTED THUG," CARRIED A REPRODUCTION OF ABID'S CARICATURE OF INTERIOR MINISTER TAHAR BALKHODJA OVER THIS NOT VERY CHARMING EPITHET.
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